## On Christian Democracy

(Graves de Communi)

The Encyclical Letter Issued by His Holiness Pope Leo XIII, January 18, 1901.

RAVE economic disputes in more than one country have Jong been raging; peace and concord are affected; the violence of the disputants grows every day; insomuch that the thoughts of the wiser part are laden with doubt and apprehension. These disputes arise in the first instance from widespread philosophical and moral error. The scientific resources belonging to the age, increased facilities of communication, and appliances of all kinds for economizing labor and making it more productive have resulted in a keener struggle for existence. Through the harmful influence of agitators the gulf between rich and poor has been widened, so that frequent disturbances arise and even great calamities seem impending, such as would bring ruin on a

country.

For Our part, Our pontificate had scarcely begun before we seriously commented upon the danger to civil society thus arising. We thought it Our duty to warn Catholics openly of the error contained in Socialist opinions, and the utter destruction with which they threatened, not temporal prosperity alone, but morality and religion. Such was the theme of the Encyclical Quod Apostolici Muneris issued by Us on December 28, 1878. As the danger grew more serious day by day, entailing public and private loss, We strove with yet more insistence to provide against it. Our letter Rerum Novarum of May 15, 1891, had a similar motive, wherein We spoke at length upon the rights and duties binding together the two classes of capitalists and workingmen, and at the same time pointed out the remedies to be derived from the precepts of the Gospel, remedies which We thought to be of especial utility for maintaining the claims of justice and religion, and for removing all occasion of strife between classes.

## RESULT OF CATHOLIC ACTION

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Our assurance, under God, has not been an idle one. Even non-Catholics, urged by the force of truth, have acknowledged that so much must be allowed the Church. that she shows herself careful of all classes of the community, and especially of the very poor. Catholics have derived abundant profit from Our writings. They have not only got from them encouragement and support in carrying out excellent projects, but they have obtained the light they wanted to direct charitable endeavor into safer and more prosperous channels. The result has been that differences of opinion have partly been removed, partly their bitterness has been lessened. Practically, in places where poverty was most severely felt, many ameliorations have with a steady purpose been introduced afresh, or usefully extended; e.g., popular secretariates, as they are called, for giving assistance to the ignorant, land banks, for making loans, societies for mutual help or relief, associations of workingmen and other useful societies and institutions of the same kind.

Thus, therefore, under the guidance of the Church, some sort of concerted action and institutional provision has been set up among Catholics for the protection of the poorer classes, who are very often as much the victims of dangerous machinations and snares as they are sufferers from hardship and poverty. The policy of help for the people had originally no name of its own; that of Christian Socialism and its derivatives, which some brought in, has not undeservedly grown obsolete. Afterwards many wanted, very rightly, to name it Christian Action for the People. In some places those who devote themselves to such work are called Christian Social Reformers; elsewhere it is called Christian Democracy, and its supporters Christian Democrats, as opposed to the Social Democracy, which Socialists

uphold.

## THE NAME CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

Of the two names that of *Christian Democracy*, if not that of *Christian Social Reform*, is offensive to many good people, inasmuch as they think there is a perilous ambiguity attaching to it. They are afraid of the name for several reasons; an extreme form of democratic state may be covertly promoted or preferred to other forms of political

constitution; the influence of Christianity may seem confined to the benefit of the common people, all other classes being as it were left out in the cold; beneath the specious designation may lurk some design or other for subverting all legitimate authority whatever, both civil and religious,

There is now commonly much dispute, and sometimes over-bitter dispute, on this topic, and We deem it Our duty to put an end to the controversy by defining what Catholics ought to think; moreover We intend to give them some injunctions so as to make their own action larger in scope and more beneficial to the commonwealth.

## SOCIAL AND CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY COMPARED

What Social Democracy means, and what Christian Democracy ought to mean, does not surely admit of doubt. The former, more or less violent in its utterances, is by many pushed so far as to reject the supernatural, to profess to aim at only bodily and material blessings, and to place human happiness in the attainment and enjoyment of such alone. Hence they wish to place the supreme power in the State in the hands of the masses: so that having destroyed class distinctions they may proceed to an equal distribution of wealth: and so the right to own private property is to be abolished, and all private possessions, including even the means of subsistence, are to become common property.

But Christian Democracy, as Christian, ought to have as its foundation the principles laid down by divine faith, and while it works for the material betterment of the masses, it should as far as it can promote the interests of souls made for what is eternal. Accordingly, to Christian Democracy there must be nothing more sacred than justice; it must insist that the right to have and to hold be kept inviolate; it must maintain the distinction between classes, which properly belongs to a well-ordered State; in fine, it must assert that human society should have that form and character which its divine Author has imposed upon it. Clearly, therefore, Social and Christian Democracy can have nothing in common; the difference between them is no less than that between the sectarianism of Socialism and the profession of the Christian law.

WRONG MEANING OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

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It would, however, be very wrong to distort the term Christian Democracy and use it in a political sense. For although Democracy, by its very name and by philosophical usage, denotes popular rule, yet in this application it must be employed altogether without political signification, so as to mean nothing but the beneficent Christian action on behalf of the people mentioned above. For the precepts of the natural law and the Gospel, for the very reason that they transcend the chances of human existence, must necessarily be independent of any particular form of civil government and adapt themselves to all, so long as these are not opposed to what is right and just. They are, therefore, and remain in themselves completely outside the party rivalries and political changes, so that, under any kind of government, people may and ought to abide by those precepts, which bid them love God above all and their neighbors as themselves. This has ever been the morality of the Church; by it Roman Pontiffs have constantly dealt with States, whatever might be their form of government. And this being so, the mind and action of Catholics, who give themselves to promoting the good of the masses may in no wise aim at embracing and introducing any one form of government in preference to another.

Just in the same way must Christian Democracy repudiate the other ground of offense, which arises from paying so much regard to the interests of the lower classes as to seem to pass over the higher, who are nevertheless of equal importance to the preservation and development of the State. The Christian law of charity, which we have just mentioned, forbids this. It is large enough to embrace all ranks as belonging to one and the same family, the offspring of the same all-beneficent Father, redeemed by one Saviour, and called to the same eternal inheritance. This is, indeed, the Apostle's doctrine and monition: One body and one Spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.1 Wherefore, because of the natural coordination of the working classes with the other ranks of society, which

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 4-6.

is made more intimate by the law of Christian brotherhood. it surely follows that whatever diligence is bestowed upon assisting the working classes must extend to these other classes-the more because it is clearly proper and even necessary, if the work is to be successful, as we shall show below, that they should be invited to take part in it.

God forbid that under the name of Christian Democracy should lie the surreptitious aim of throwing off all obedi-

ence and turning from those in lawful authority.

## OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY

The law of nature, no less than that of Christ, enjoins respect for all such as in their several degrees hold office in the State, and further enjoins obedience to their lawful commands. This is the only attitude worthy of a man and a Christian, and ought to be taken up heartily and as a matter of duty, "for conscience' sake," as the Apostle himself has admonished us, when he ordained: Let every soul be subject to higher powers.2 It is absolutely inconsistent with Christian profession, that any one should refuse to submit and be obedient to those set aside to rule in the Church, especially to the Bishops, whom (without prejudice to the authority of the Roman Pontiff over all and each) the Holy Ghost hath placed to rule the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own Blood.3 Any one who thinks or acts differently is convicted of forgetfulness of the same Apostle's most solemn injunction: Obey your prelates and be subject to them, for they watch as being to render an account of your souls.4 It is most important that the Faithful should all and each have these words deeply implanted in their minds, and should study in their daily life to put them in practice; and that those who minister about sacred things should also reflect upon them very diligently, and not fail to teach them to others by their words—yes, and still more by their example.

## THE AIM OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

We have recalled subjects with which we have already dealt at length as occasion arose, and we trust that all dispute over the name of Christian Democracy may now be laid aside, as well as any suspicion that there is a dangerous meaning in the name. This trust we may rightly cherish. For with the exception of certain persons whose ideas regarding the force and virtue of this kind of Christian Democracy are not free from extravagance or error, surely there will be no single person to find fault with an endeavor, comformably to the law of nature and of God. to do merely this-to make the lives of laborers and artisans more tolerable, to enable them gradually to make some provision for themselves, to make it possible for them at home and in the world freely to fulfil the obligations of virtue and religion, to let them feel themselves to be men, and not mere animals, Christian men and not pagans, and so enable them to strive with more facility and earnestness to attain that one thing needful, that final good for which we came into the world. This is the aim and the task of those who in a Christian spirit would have the working-classes on the one hand suitably helped, and, on the other, preserved against the contagion of Socialism.

## THE SOCIAL QUESTION PRIMARILY MORAL AND RELIGIOUS

We spoke just now advisedly of virtue and religion. For it is the opinion of some, which is caught up by the masses, that the social question, as they call it, is merely economic. The precise opposite is the truth, that it is first of all moral and religious, and for that reason its solution is to be expected mainly from the moral law and the pronouncements of religion. For suppose the productiveness of capital doubled, the hours of labor shortened, food cheap; yet if the wage earner listens to teaching—as he commonly does, and acts upon it-which tends to destroy reverence for God and to corrupt morals, his labor, too, necessarily deteriorates and his earnings fail. It is found by practical experience that many a workman lives poorly and miserably, in spite of shorter hours and higher wages, because of his character being bad and religion having no hold upon him. Without the instincts which Christian religion implants, and keeps alive, without providence, self-control, thrift, endurance and other natural qualities, you may try your hardest, but prosperity you cannot provide. That is the reason why We have never encouraged Catholics to form associations to better the lot of the working-class, or introduce other schemes of the kind, without at the same time warning them that such things must not be attempted without the sanction of religion, without its inclusion and aid.

## CHRISTIAN CHARITY

However, Catholic devotion to the working-class deserves the greatest commendation as a development in the same field in which active charity has always and happily labored, under the benignant influence of the Church, in various ages. By the law of mutual charity, which, as it were, completes the law of justice, we are bidden not only to give to all their due and interfere with the rights of none, but also to do kindnesses one to another not in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth,5 remembering what Christ most lovingly said to His disciples: A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another.6 Such zeal for doing kindnesses, though it ought to be first of all solicitous about the eternal good of souls, should yet by no means neglect what is good and useful for this life. Here it is worthy of remark that Christ, when the disciples of the Baptist asked Him: "Art thou He that are to come, or look we for another?" grounded the evidence for the office entrusted to Him among mankind on this particular work of charity, recalling the phrase of Isaiah: The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.7 Speaking also of the last judgment and the rewards and punishments to be then adjudged. He declared that He would particularly examine the charity men had used one towards another. In this discourse of Christ it is indeed wonderful how, leaving unmentioned that side of compassion that ministers to the soul, He spoke only of the offices of bodily compassion, and of them as being bestowed upon Himself: I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; sick, and you visited Me; I was in

prison, and you came to Me.8

In addition to these marks of His approval of charity in either direction, whether as regards the good of the soul or that of the body, every one knows that Christ gave the most signal exemplifications in His own person. In this connection it is sweet to recall the expression of His paternal heart: I have compassion on the multitude: 9 and His equal willingness to help even by miraculous aid, a compassion which has this undying record: He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil.10 The rule of charity delivered by Him the Apostles first industriously and with holy zeal observed; after them those who embraced the Christian faith inaugurated an abundance of institutions, designed to alleviate the miseries that oppressed mankind. These institutions grew and increased, and became the peculiar and glorious ornaments of the Christian name, and of the civilization thence derived; so that people of sound intelligence cannot sufficiently admire them, especially when it is so natural for each to look after his own interests and put those of other people second.

## ALMSGIVING

In the number of such benefactions must not be left out the distribution of money in the interests of almsgiving to which the saying of Christ applies: That which remaineth, give alms. No doubt Socialists carp at this, and would have it altogether abolished, as derogatory to the native nobility of man. Yet if it is done according to the precepts of the Gospel and in a Christian manner, it neither feeds the pride of the distributor nor inflicts any humiliation on the recipient. So far from its being unbecoming to any one, it rather fosters the good-fellowship of human association by fostering the friendliness of mutual service. There is no one so rich as to have no need of any one else; none so poor that he cannot do his neighbor some good turn; and the disposition to ask assistance from

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., xxv, 35, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Mark viii, 2.

others with confidence, and to grant it with kindness is part of our very nature. So justice and charity mutually conjoined, according to the equal and gentle law of Christ, maintain in a wonderful way the bonds of human society, and providently lead every member to cater for his own and the common good.

## BEST KIND OF HELP

It is a laudable charity not merely to give temporary aid to the working-class but also to establish permanent means of help; the result will be a more assured and reliable assistance. Hence worthy of all praise is the project to train the craftsman and other workers in habits of saving and self-help, so that as time goes on they may have some resources at least to fall back on. Such a project not only helps the rich to do their duty towards the working-class, but also gives a moral help to that class; for while it encourages them to improve their position, it keeps them away from temptations, checks self-indulgence, and leads them on to virtuous behavior. Being, then, so useful and so timely an endeavor, it deserves, surely, to be kept in view by the energetic and prudent charity of all right-minded people.

Let it, then, be remembered that the Catholic zeal for the relief and elevation of the masses must be absolutely in harmony with the mind of the Church, and accurately correspond with the pattern she continuously sets before us. Whether such aims are to be designated by the name of Christian Action for the People or of Christian Democracy is a very small matter, so long as Our published instructions are entirely observed, and with a fitting obedience. But it is of the utmost consequence, in a matter of such moment, that the minds, the wills, the actions of Catholics should be one and the same. It is no less important that as helpers and means increase, there should be larger action and a wider scope. In particular, the kind assistance is to be invited of those whose rank and wealth and superior culture carry with them more influence in the State. If this assistance is not given, scarcely anything can be effected of real avail towards the improvement which it is sought to introduce in the life of the people.

## COOPERATION OF THE RICH

Certainly, the path of improvement is better assured and more quickly traversed, the more we have the cooperation of the well-to-do, with their wide opportunities of effectual aid. We would have them consider for themselves that they are not free to choose whether they will take up the cause of the poor or not; it is a matter of simple duty. Men live in a civic society not only for their own good, but also for the good of all; some are too poor to contribute their share to the common stock: those. therefore, who can should contribute more generously. The extent of this obligation is in proportion to the amount of riches received: the larger it is, the stricter must be the account we shall have to render to God, who gave it to us. We learn the same lesson from the plague of calamity which, unless a remedy be applied in time is going to break out upon us to the ruin and destruction of all classes; he who neglects to take up the cause of the poor acts without regard to his personal interest as well as that of his country.

But if such social enterprise, which is, at the same time, Christian enterprise, should take a wide hold and flourish unprevented, it need not, by any means, result that other institutions which were established long ago by the piety and foresight of our ancestors, and still subsist. should die out or become as it were absorbed in the new organization. The one as well as the others, having the same religious and charitable design, and with no real antagonism existing between them, may advantageously and suitably work side by side, so as the better to provide. by the coordination of various beneficiary efforts, for the daily increasing necessities and dangers to which the masses are exposed. Courage and union of efforts are loudly demanded by the situation. Only too abundant is the harvest of miseries we have before our eyes, and formidable indeed is the impending danger of fatal disturbances, especially through the growing strength of Socialist opinion. Socialism cunningly works its way into the heart of the community; in the darkness of secret assemblies and openly in the light of day, by speeches and by writings, it excites the people to sedition; the restraints of religion are thrown aside, duties are neglected and only rights upheld; it works on ever-increasing numbers of the poor whose poverty makes them more easily tricked and led into error. Civil society no less than religion is imperiled; it is the sacred duty of every right-minded man to be up in defense of both the one and the other.

## AVOIDANCE OF DISPUTES

To attain the desired unity of will it is essential, moreover, that we should abstain from what gives rise to disputes, which may give offense and cause division. There should be no discussion in newspapers and popular meetings of subtle and generally quite unprofitable questions, which are difficult to expound and demand for their understanding suitable qualities of intellect and no ordinary It is, indeed, natural to find doubts on many subjects, and for different people to hold different opinions: yet those who conscientiously seek the truth will keep in matters of dispute a calm temper, and express themselves with modesty and with courtesy towards others, so as to prevent differences of opinion leading to a conflict of wills. But in questions admitting of doubt, whatever any one prefers to think, he must make up his mind reverently to submit with religious obedience to any decision in the matter which may hereafter be given by the Apostolic See.

## COORDINATION OF EFFORT

The action of Catholics, of whatever sort, will proceed with a larger effectiveness, if all their associations, while the rights of each remain secure, have one and the same directing and moving force at their head. In Italy We desire this office to be undertaken by the Institute of Catholic Congresses and Assemblies, which We have often had occasion to commend; this charge of controlling the common stock of Catholics, but always subject to the guidance and direction of the Bishop, was committed to it by Ourselves, as by Our predecessor. The same should be done in other nations, if there is anywhere any chief society to which the office may have been legitimately entrusted.

## HELP OF THE CLERGY

In any enterprise of this kind, with which the interests of the Church and of Christians are so closely bound up, it is clear that the priesthood ought to be throughout concerned, and that it may assist in many ways by its learning, its prudence, and its charity. More than once, when addressing the clergy. We have taken the opportunity to make clear the advantage in these days of going amongst the people and bringing a healthy influence to bear on them. Often in letters addressed to bishops and others in Holy Orders, even within recent years (to the General of the Order of Friars Minor, November 25, 1898), We have praised this particular loving care of the people, and have said that it specially belonged to both Orders of the clergy. In the performance of this duty, however, let them proceed very cautiously and with prudence, according to the example of the saints. The poor and humble Francis, or Vincent de Paul the father of the unfortunate, and many others mentioned in the annals of the Church, were accustomed so to regulate their constant care for the people, that without being unduly distracted or forgetful of themselves they, with equal ardor, worked at their own souls and reached perfect virtue.

## LESSONS TO BE TAUGHT

We should like here to add, a little more explicitly, how not only the ministers of sacred things, but all who are zealous in the people's cause, may do the best service, without finding it difficult. They must, along with their charitable efforts, strive, as opportunity serves, to instil into the souls of the masses, with all brotherly manner of speech, these five things: To beware of sedition, and of seditious persons, wherever found; to hold inviolate the rights of every one else; to show willingly due deference to their masters and do honest work; not to get a distaste for the life of the home, which is in many ways so fruitful in good; to attend especially to religion, and seek in it their sure consolation amid the hardships of life. To carry this out it will be of the greatest help to recall to their minds the supreme pattern of the Holy Family of Naz-

areth, and to recommend them to seek its help, to put before them the examples of those whom the very poverty of their lives led to the greatest virtue, or again to foster in them the hope of an abiding reward in the better life to come.

Finally, We again enjoin, and with greater insistence. that whatever schemes people take up in the popular cause, whether individually or in association, they should remember that they must be entirely submissive to episcopal authority. Do not let them be beguiled by an excessive ardor for charitable enterprise, which if it induces any relaxation of due obedience is itself false, unproductive of solid benefit, and displeasing to God. Those who please God are those who are ready to give up their own ideas and listen to the bidding of the rulers of the Church absolutely, as to His own; to such He readily gives aid, even when attempting very difficult enterprises, and is wont, in His kindness, to bring their undertakings to the fulfilment they desire. Let there be given, moreover, a consistent and virtuous example, especially such as shows the Christian to be a hater of sloth and self-indulgence, a giver in friendly-wise of his abundance to the necessities of others, one who in misfortune is unmoved and unbroken. Such an example has great effect in exciting healthy dispositions among the masses, and it has an increased force when it is the life of some leading man that is so adorned.

We exhort you, Venerable Brethren, to see these things with your wonted prudence and assiduity as the individual and local circumstances demand, and to take counsel with one another about them in your customary meetings. But let your vigilance be on the watch and your authority exercised; regulating, restraining, and resisting, that on no pretext of promoting good the vigor of holy discipline be relaxed, or the rule of order disturbed which Christ laid down for His Church. With right and harmonious and progressive action on the part of all Catholics, let it the more conspicuously be seen, that orderly tranquillity and true prosperity especially flourish under the favor and protection of the Church, whose most holy office it is to admonish all of their duty according to the precepts of Christ, to unite rich and poor in fraternal charity, and

to uplift and strengthen the spirits of men in the adverse course of life's affairs.

Let Our directions and wishes be recommended to you by that exhortation of St. Paul to the Romans, so full of apostolic charity: I beseech you . . . be reformed in the newness of your mind. . . . He that giveth, with simplicity; he that ruleth, with carefulness; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Having that which is evil, cleaving to that which is good. Loving one another with the charity of brotherhood, with honor preventing one another. In carefulness not slothful; in spirit fervent, serving the Lord. Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; instant in prayer. Communicating to the necessities of the saints; pursuing hospitality. Rejoice with them that rejoice: weep with them that weep. Being of one mind one towards another. To no man rendering evil for evil. Providing good things, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men.12

12 Rom. xii, 1-17.

# QUESTIONS ON THE ENCYCLICAL "CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY"

 Whence arose the disputes existing at the time of writing the Encyclicals? (P. 393.)\*

2. Reason for the Encyclical? (Pp. 393, 5.)

 Was this the first Papal pronouncement on the then current problems? (Pp. 393, 7, 8.)

4. Did these pronouncements have any effect? (P. 304.)
5. Was the term "Christian Socialism" correct? (P. 394.)

- 6. What are we to think of the terms "Christian Democracy" and "Christian Social Reform"? (Pp. 394, 5, 7, 8, 401.)
  7. What is the difference between "Social Democracy" and "Christian
  - What is the difference between "Social Democracy" and "Christian Democracy"? (P. 395.) Have they anything in common? (P. 395.)
- What is the proper meaning of "Christian Democracy"? (P. 396.)
- Should "Christian Democracy" obtain under any form of government? (P. 396.)
- 10. Does Christian Democracy look only to the poor? (Pp. 396, 7.)

<sup>\*</sup> The questions are such that the students should find it necessary to spend a fair amount of time and thought to secure an adequate answer. They are "leading" questions.

- 11. Whence comes the obligation to obey duly constituted authority? (P. 397.)
- Is there a special obligation on Catholics to be obedient? (P. 397.)
- 13. What is the aim of Christian Democracy? (P. 398.)
  14. Is the social question merely economic? (P. 398.)
- 15. Do lack of belief in God and an immoral life influence a laborer's work? (Pp. 398, 9.)
- 16. Do charitable works help? (P. 399.)
- 17. What was Christ's attitude to charitable works? (Pp. 399, 400.)
- 18. How did the early Christians act? (P. 400.) 19. Is almsgiving praiseworthy? (Pp. 400, 1.)
- 20. Should the workingman be encouraged to save? (P. 401.)
- 21. Is the cooperation of the wealthy of any importance? (Pp. 401, 2.)
- 22. Can older institutions be of use today? (P. 402.)
- 23. Are coordination and union desirable? (Pp. 402, 3.)
- 24. How should all act in matters of doubt or where a difference of opinion arises? (P. 403.)
  - 25. Have priests a special obligation? (P. 404.)
- 26. What things are to be specially stressed? (P. 404.)
- 27. Does Nazareth afford an example? (Pp. 404, 5.)
- 28. What example can the worker afford? (P. 405.)
- 29. Has St. Paul any instruction on this matter? (P. 406.)

## REFERENCES

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Furthermore, reference is made to books and articles dealing with the larger concept of the state, since many of the problems of which the Pope treats depend for their settlement on the proper philosophy of the state.

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- (These are published by the America Press with study-club supple-
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